

Copy

(I) call the attention of my readers to the memorable affair of the learned Doctors & Mr. Wm. Ireland who had died recently & to whose memory I would do full justice if I could.

I have recently received the following letter, & I request the attention of my readers to the subject, for it belongs to this very matter of which I am now treating. It amply illustrates the base & bad passions of pedants, their injustice, their cruelty, their inexorable spite & malice - - - - - ? -

Of this we shall see proof quite complete in this case of Mr. Ireland - a short sketch of whose history I must now give to the Young Men of England. - - - - -

About the year 1799 & for perhaps twenty years preceeding that time, it was the fashion among the fools of England to admire the plays of Shakspeare, & about the year 1799 the nation became absolutely Shakspeare-mad.

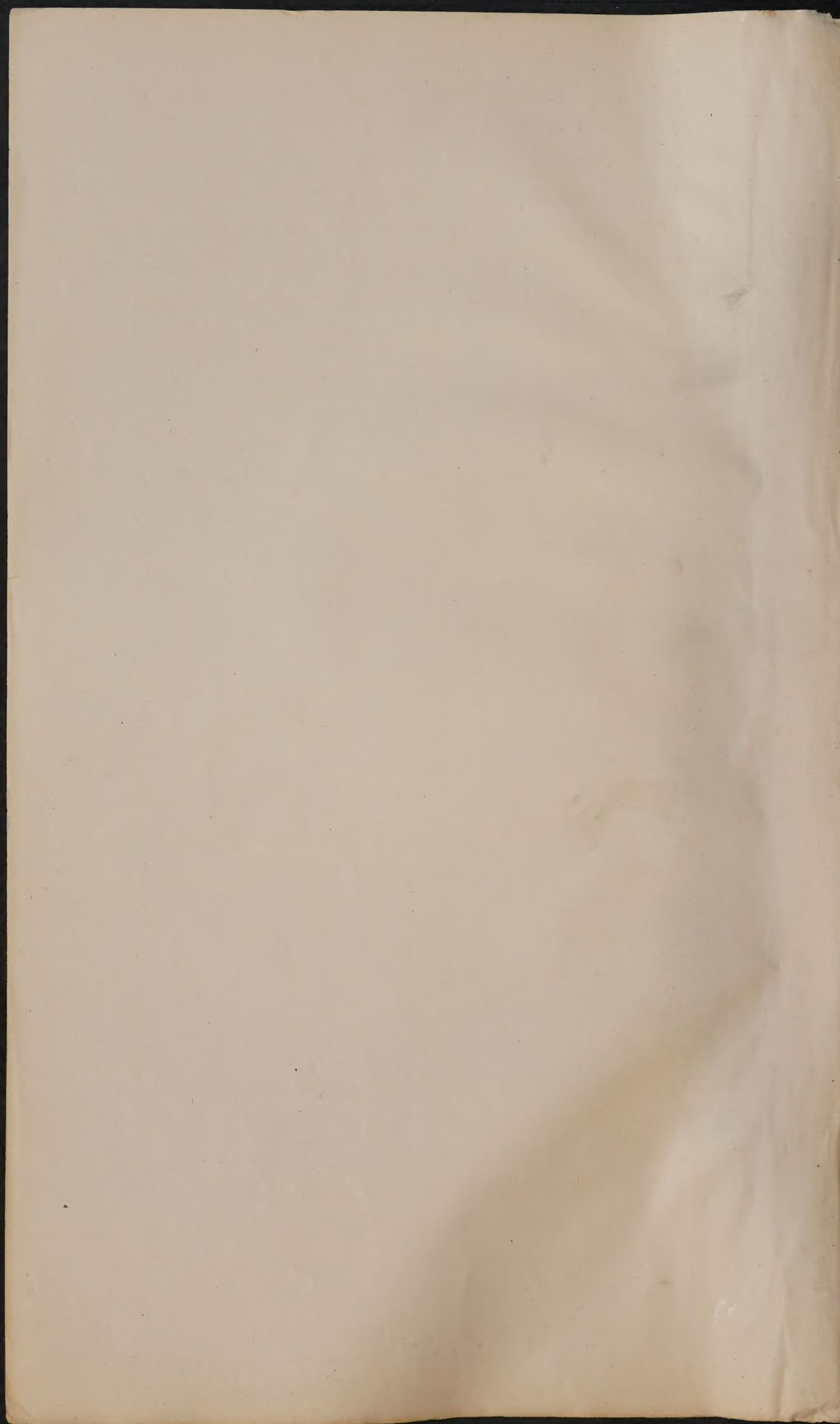
I saw the madness going on & had seen it from the time that I myself began to read. I read the books, I was under no influence but that of my own mind, I found here & there passages in these books which delighted me very much, but for the main part I could see nothing but wild absurdities, low punning & indecent allusions. In short with a very few exceptions I despised the book, & wondered how anybody could admire it. In this state of mind with regard to this book, caring & thinking however very little about the matter, I returned to England in the year 1800 & found all London in a sort of commotion about "Ireland & Shakspeare Manuscripts". The reader will please to observe, that while in America I had been very zealous in defending my own country knowing nothing whatever about the real merits of the war in which she was engaged. I was therefore received very graciously by all the partisans of Pitt & the war, amongst others by Dr. Ireland, now

(1) All the attention of my readers to the memorable
affair of the learned doctors & Mr. Wm. Ireland who had
died recently & to whose memory I would be full justice
if I could.

I have recently received the following letter, &
I request the attention of my readers to the subject,
for it belongs to this very matter of which I am now
treating. It amply illustrates the case & the position
of patients, their interests, their anxiety, their inexorable
spite & malice - - - - -

Of this we shall see proof quite complete in this
case of Mr. Ireland - a short sketch of whose history I
must now give to the Young Men of Ireland. - - - - -

About the year 1793 & for perhaps twenty years
preceding that time, it was the fashion among the lords
of England to admire the plays of Shakespeare, & about the
year 1793 the nation became absolutely Shakespeare-mad.
I saw the madness going on & had seen it from the
time that I myself began to read. I read the books, I was
under no influence but that of my own mind, I found here
a large passage in those books which delighted me very
much, but for the most part I could see nothing but wild
absurdities, few punning & indecent allusions. In short,
with a very few exceptions I despised the book, & was
determined how anybody could admire it. In this state of mind
with regard to this book, seeing & thinking however very
little about the matter, I returned to England in the
year 1800 & found all London in a sort of commotion about
"Ireland & Shakespeare's Manuscripts". The reader will please
to observe, that while in America I had been very zealous
in defending my own country knowing nothing whatever about
the real merits of the war in which she was engaged. I
was therefore received very graciously by all the parti-



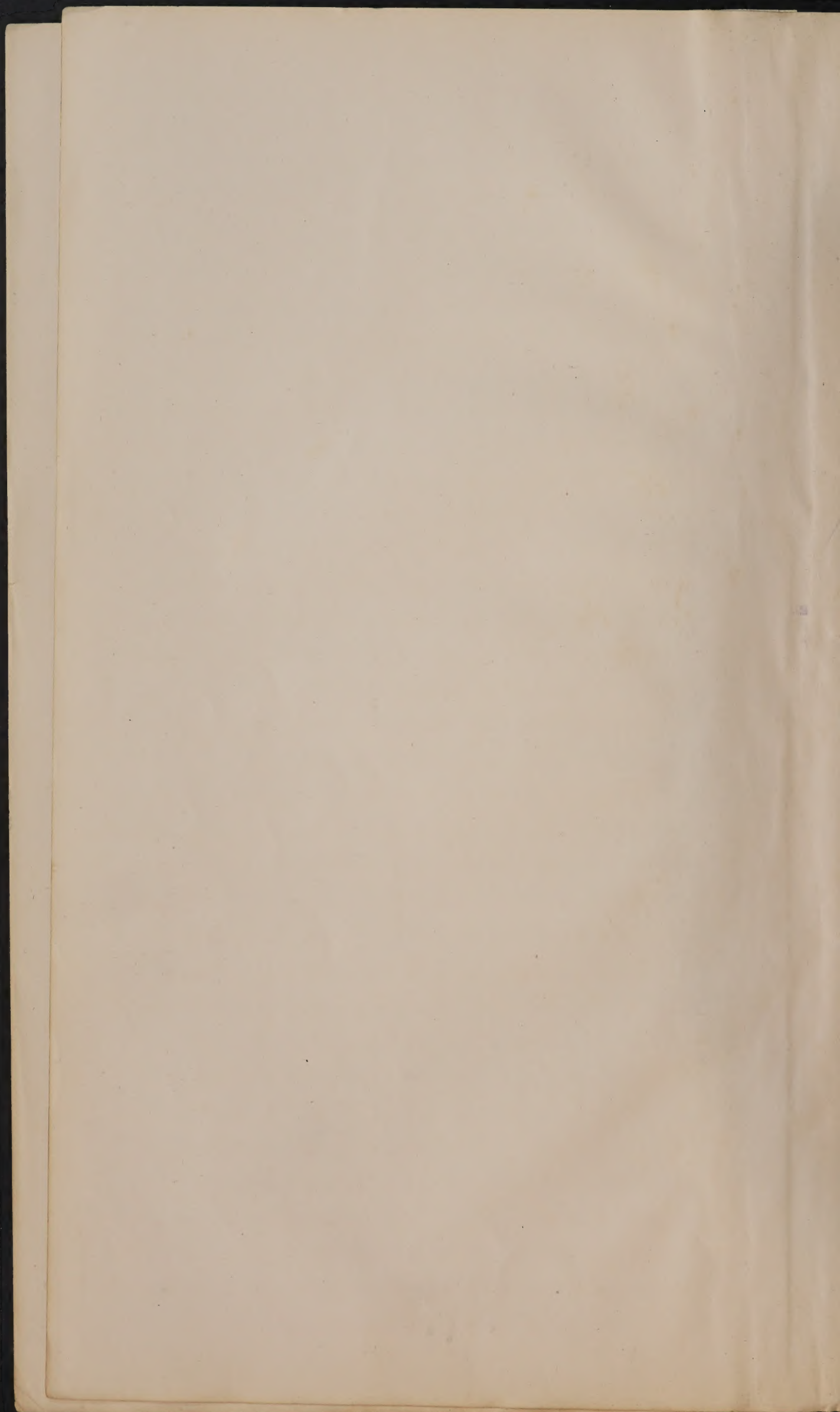
Dean of Westminster, who had been the tutor of sapient Liverpool, & who therefore in addition to his living of Croydon, & some other things, soon after my return to England, became Dean of Westminster. The Doctor in addition to his merits as a tutor had the greater merit of having written & published a pamphlet in defence of Pitt & the war. By way of gratitude to me for having been the pleader of the cause in the United States, the Doctor, (then Mr. Ireland) in being introduced to me, did me the honour to present me with a copy of his pamphlet, which he put into my hands with a most solemn caution in very nearly the following words. "My name is Ireland Mr. Cobbett, but I beg you to believe that I am in nowise related, even in the most distant degree to the impostor of that name, who has lately committed so infamous a fraud upon the public". This lead me to inquire into the meaning of all this fuss. I had always had a natural hatred of oppression, I had no very great opinion of Shakspeare's writings, I expressed to a friend a wish "to see this impostor," I soon saw him, he told me his story & put his published narrative into my hands, the truth of which narrative never has been contradicted in any one particular, to my satisfaction.

Mr. Wm. Ireland was then a very young man, having been articled to an attorney, & living near the theatres he had been a haunter of the playhouse, but his natural good sense had prevented him from becoming Shakspeare-mad. His father however, who was a gentleman of respectability, in his state of life, happened to be the maddest of the mad. Amongst other effects of this madness was a resolution of the father to perform a "pilgrimage" to the house where Shakspeare was born, which as they said was near the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, in Warwickshire.

Having determined upon the pilgrimage, he also determined to take his son along with him. They found the house, or reputed house, to be an old lumbering farm-

*This was Clopton House not
the Birthplace*

Dean of Westminster, who had been the tutor of aspi-
rant, & who therefore in addition to his living of
London, & some other things, soon after my return to
Ireland, became Dean of Westminster. The Doctor in ad-
dition to his merits as a tutor had the greater merit
of having written & published a pamphlet in defence of
Pitt & the war. My way of gratitude to me for having
been the pleader of the cause in the United States, the
Doctor, (then Mr. Ireland) in being introduced to me, did
me the honour to present me with a copy of his pamphlet,
which he put into my hands with a most solemn caution
in very nearly the following words. "My name is Ireland
Mr. Cobden, but I beg you to believe that I am in nowise
related, even in the most distant degree to the impostor
of that name, who has lately committed so infamous a
fraud upon the public". This led me to inquire into
the meaning of all this fuss. I had always had a natural
hatred of oppression, I had no very great opinion of
Shakespeare's writings, I expressed to a friend a wish
"to see this impostor". I soon saw him, he told me his
story & put his published narrative into my hands, the
truth of which narrative never has been contradicted
in any one particular, to my satisfaction.
Mr. Wm. Ireland was then a very young man, having
been articled to an attorney, & living near the theatre
he had been a member of the playhouse, but his natural
good sense had prevented him from becoming Shakespeare-
mad. His father however, who was a gentleman of respect-
ability, in his state of life, happened to be the mad-
dest of the mad. Amongst other effects of this madness
was a resolution of the father to perform a "pigmy"
to the house where Shakespeare was born, which as they said
was near the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, in Warwickshire.
Having determined upon the pigmy, he also
determined to take his son along with him. They found
the house, or reputed house, to be an old lumbering farm-



house of large dimensions & ancient structure.

The first ceremony performed by the father, being shewn into a room he had chosen to believe "Shakspeare had sitten", was to go upon his bare knees lift up his hands & eyes, & out other mad capers in adoration of Shakspeare.

Having performed these antics, he asked the farmer's wife or the farmer, whether they had ever seen *Mr. Williams* any written papers about the house. After a good deal of anxiety expressed by him on this subject, he was told that some years ago in clearing out one of the upper rooms, there was a great parcel of old written papers found. "Well" exclaimed the father with surprising eagerness "& where are they". The farmer & his wife had no distinct recollection of the disposal the invaluable documents, but "presumed that they had been flung into the fire". Upon this the father exclaimed "Oh! wretched woman! do you know what you have done! do you know that you have done an injury to the world which you can never repair.?"

I suppose that the farmer & his wife thought the man mad, & as far as related to that matter he certainly was. These scenes however had a very different effect upon the mind of the son, who thought that the Shakspeare manuscripts might be made, & his father thus gratified to his heart's content. Upon going home it was easy for him to find manuscripts of the time of Queen Elizabeth, when Shakspeare wrote; but then there must be paper to write upon, that was made in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

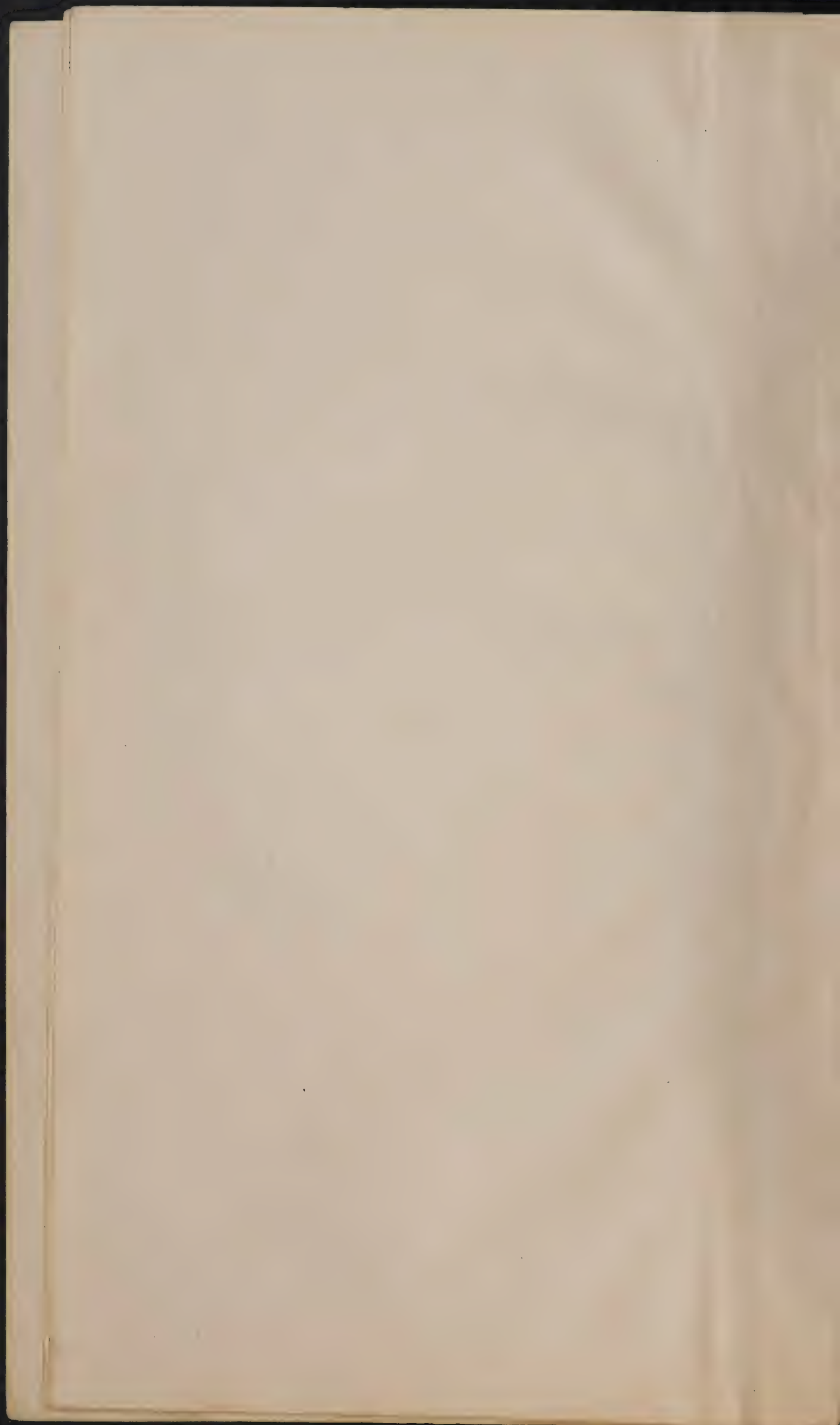
There was a bookseller of the name of Earle who lived in Albemarle Street, & who dealt in old books, & the son of this bookseller was an intimate acquaintance of Wm. Ireland. From him he got the blank leaves of old books, yellow as a kite's foot. On these he wrote several things in Shakspeare's own hand,

of large dimensions & ancient structure.
The first ceremony performed by the father,
shown into a room he had chosen to believe
there had been a room, was to go upon his bare knees
up his hands & eyes, & cut other mad papers in
them of Shakspeare.

Having performed these antics, he asked the far-
wife or the farmer, whether they had ever seen
written papers about the house. After a good deal
anxiety expressed by him on this subject, he was
that some years ago in clearing out one of the
rooms, there was a great parcel of old written
a found. "Well," exclaimed the father with sur-
ng answers "where are they?" The farmer & his
had no distinct recollection of the disposal
invaluable documents, but "presumed that they had
flung into the fire." Upon this the father ex-
and "Oh! wretched woman! do you know what you have
do you know that you have done an injury to the
which you can never repair?"

I suppose that the farmer & his wife thought the
and, as far as related to that matter he certainly
These scenes however had a very different effect
the mind of the son, who thought that the Shaks-
a manuscript might be made, & his father thus
plied to his heart's content. Upon going home
was easy for him to find manuscripts of the time
when Elizabeth, when Shakspeare wrote; but then
must be paper to write upon, that was made in
reign of Queen Elizabeth.

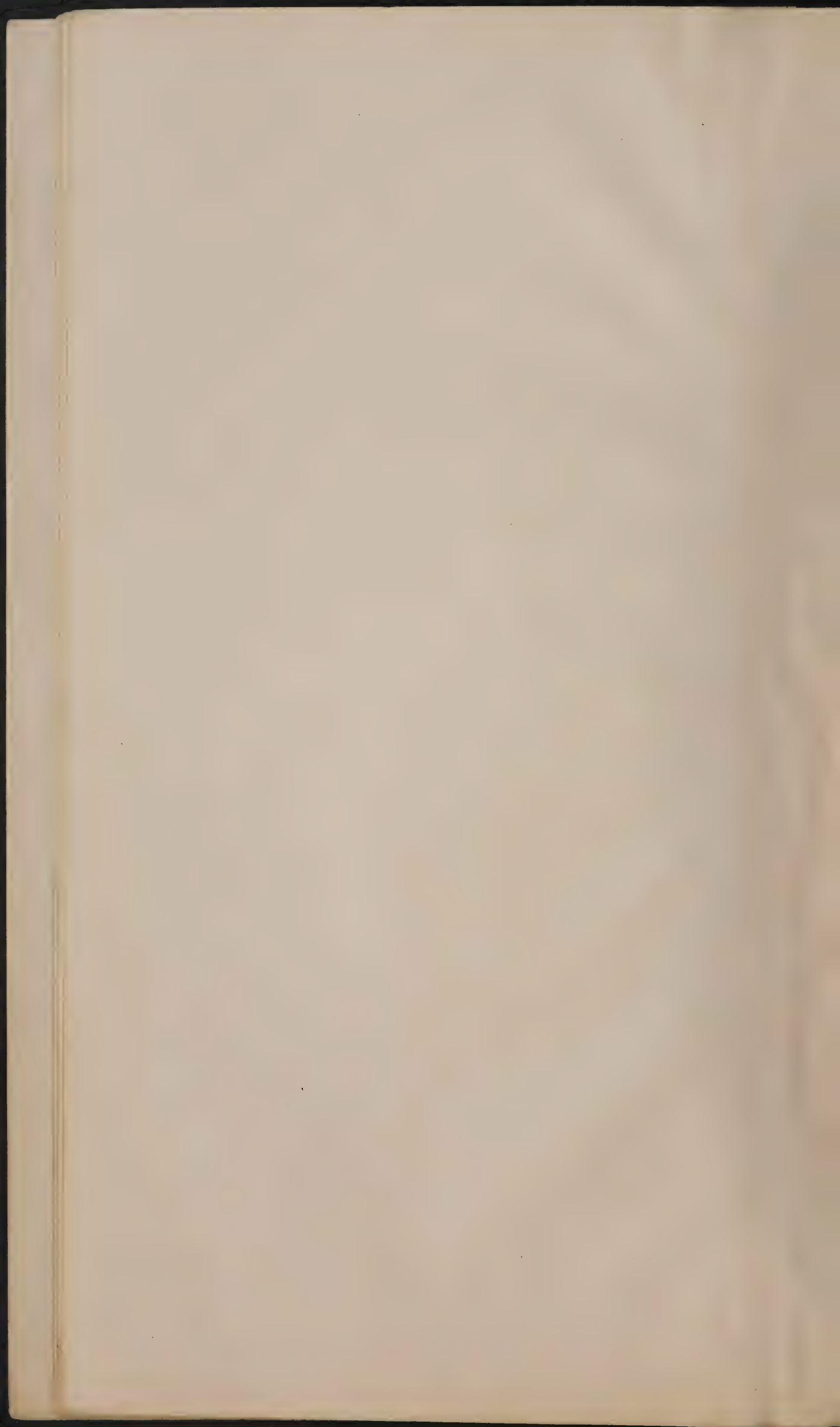
There was a bookseller of the name of Randle
lived in Alderman's Street, & who dealt in old
& the son of this bookseller was an intimate
friend of Mr. Ireland. From him he got the plan
of old books, yellow as a kite's foot. On these
wrote several things in Shakspeare's own hand.



Love-letters, prayers, marginal notes in a Bible, printed in the age of Queen Elizabeth, poems as dull as quibbling, as punning, & as indecent in there allusions as Shakspeare ever wrote, & at last a couple of plays entitled "Vortigern & Rowenna" & Henry the Second" which he wrote at the age of eighteen. He made his father believe that all these manuscripts, had been furnished to him by a Mr. Talbot, who was a descendant of the family of Shakspeare, & as I understood from him, his father really believed the fact. The father not the son, published the manuscripts by subscription.

The "learned world" disputed as to the genuineness of the productions, one side contending that they were genuine, & the other side that they were not, but the play of Vortigern was acted at Drury Lane or Covent Garden I forget which, the parties opposed to the genuineness contrived matters so that the play should not succeed to any great extent, but a Certificate under the hands of Dr. Parr, Dr. Wharton, & George Chalmers, declared it to be their conviction that no human being but Shakspeare himself could have written these manuscripts. At last it was discovered by nothing but the indiscretion of Wm. Ireland himself, that he was the author of the manuscripts! Instantly the base wretches from every quarter, poured on upon him, instead of admiring his ingenuity, & apologising, as well as they could, for their own folly, in having been Shakspeare mad, they pitched on upon him like tigers, called him a forger, called him an impostor, & almost literally hunted him from the face of the earth.

His father who had received all the profits from the subscription & publication, full of terror at the threatened vengeance of the exposed pedants, joined against him, cancelled his articles with the attorney, disowned him, drove him from his house, & Mr. Wm. Ireland told me, that having crept into a beggarly lodging in



an alley in Swallow Street, I think it was, he existed there ten days upon four pounds of potatoes! I never heard, & I believe no man ever heard, of injustice & cruelty to surpass this. Such is the effect of book education in softening the heart.

I published this account in substance in my "Advice to Young Men" & I received a letter from Mr. Ireland at the time, declaring that my statement in that book was correct.

It remains for me now to insert a letter which I have received from a friend of the widow & children of Mr. Ireland, & to add a few remarks upon the contents of that letter, the name of the writer of which I do not insert, merely because he has not positively authorized me to do it, but I shall be glad to see him at any time, & to do anything in my power to further his laudable views.

LONDON. Mayday 1835.

Sir,

You are respectfully acquainted that "William Henry Ireland" of Shaksperian notoriety, the author of "Vortigern & Rowenna, & Henry 2nd. the forged plays said to be Shakspeare's & other interesting pieces, left this sublunary world on Good Friday, the 17th. & was interred in the burial ground of St. George's in the borough on Friday the 24th. ultimo.

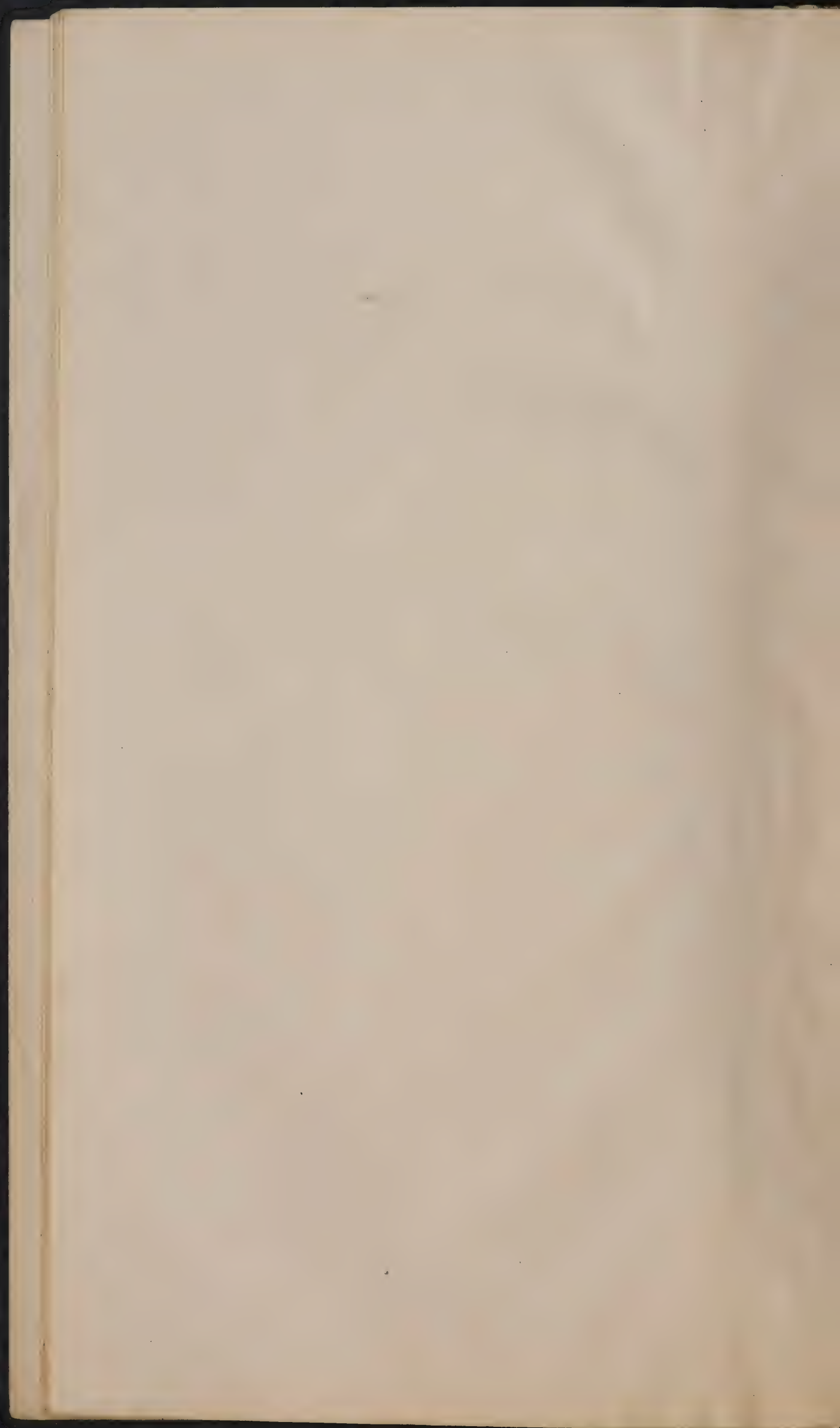
Mr. Ireland has left a widow & two daughters, & like most authors, without any provision save what can be made of a few poetical scraps, & prose pieces unpublished, when collected together & submitted to public competition by sale, with perhaps a copyright or two.

There is also an unpublished MS. entitled the "Reminiscences of Wm. Hy. Ireland" a performance full of anecdote relating to the Shakspeare controversy, to theatrical persons & literary characters of that

period, which I believe it is intended to publish by subscription for the benefit of his family (if practicable)

The Shaksperian Forgeries, as they are termed, proved to be the bane of his life & the seed of all his subsequent misfortunes, public prejudice making no distinction between the forger of a literary production & the forger of a bill of exchange, nor whether the author, the victim of his ingenuity, were living, or dead three centuries ago, no allowance was made for the invention or literary talent of a youth scarcely ²⁰ eighteen, so powerfully displayed in the "Vortigern & Rowenna" & "Henry 2nd.", the two historical dramas imitative, but never avowed by him to be the production of Shakspeare.

His family, from the manner Mr. Ireland always spoke of you as a friend, flatter themselves that you will be kind enough to spare them an hour from your literary & public engagements to write an obituary article for them in one of your publications, they will in addition to what is here stated, furnish you with particulars of his various literary performances, published & unpublished, & other incidents of his life, the object of which is a hope, that your all-powerful pen will be able to redeem his reputation from the opprobrious stigma under which he has so long lived & died, of a forger, & claim for him at least the merit of a respectable dramatist, evinced I trust decidedly by the compositions of Vortigern & Rowenna & Henry 2nd., than which some think we have had nothing better since, & though he may have been injudicious in attempting the Shaksperian style, surely as he never avowed them to be originally Shakspeare's there was nothing criminal in that display of talent in a lad of ²⁰ eighteen only, as the public were left to exercise their criticism on his composition, & fairly to decide the question of originality, which they did



against him, but at the same time refused to him the mode of talent he deserved, & treated him with the same severity for imitating the style of their favourite bard, that he would have been, had he attempted a forgery of the sacred text of Scripture.

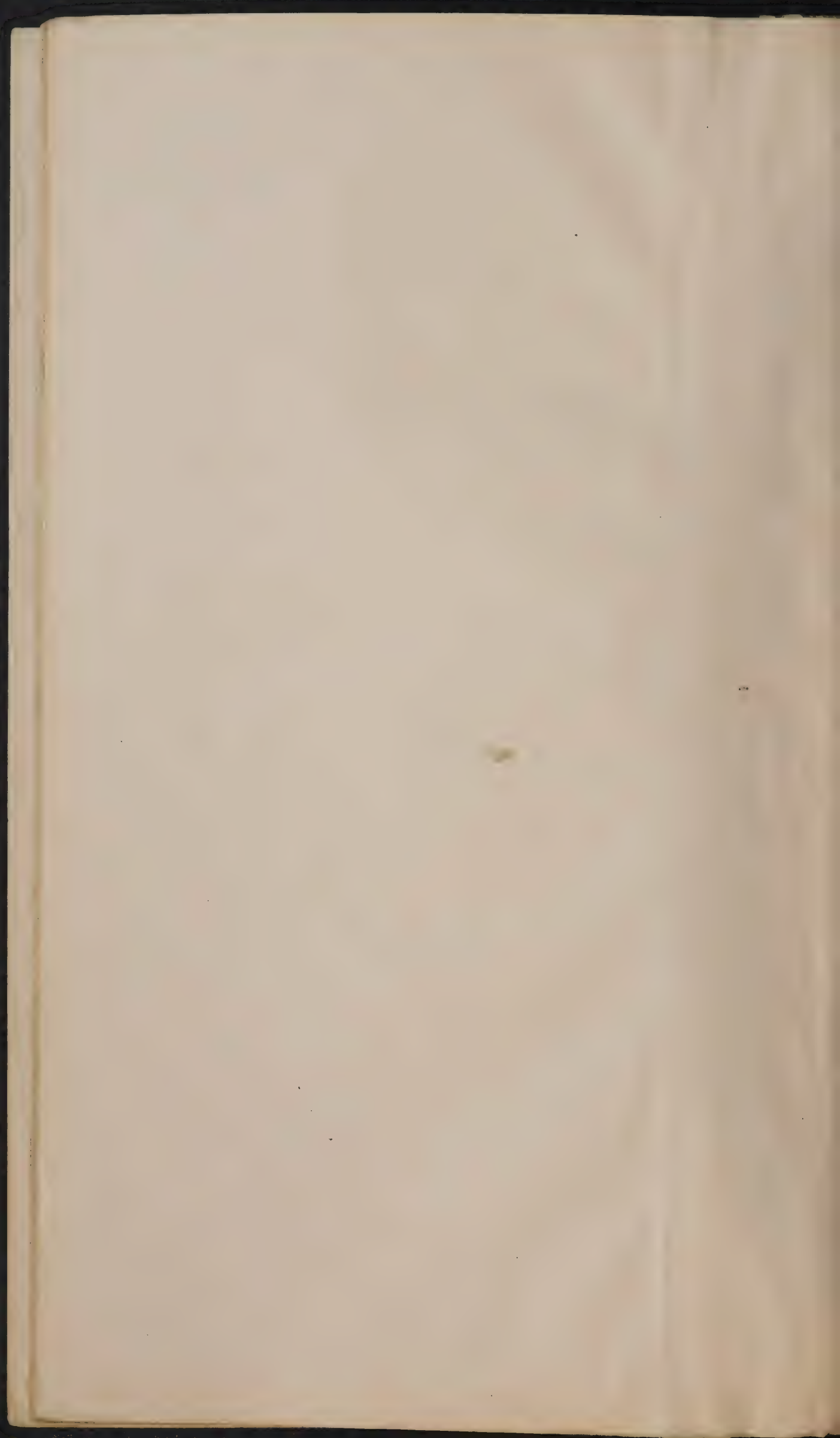
If so much can be spared from the occupations of your valuable time, it will be rendering the family an essential service & kindness & the cause of literature & the drama no disservice.

With these sentiments & motives but imperfectly
expressed, I have the honour to subscribe myself

Yours most respectfully

Now I do not know anything more than what is said in this letter of the circumstances of Mrs. Ireland & her children, but this I do know, that nothing would be more becoming of the people of this country, than to come to their assistance in some way or another in order to show, if there were no other end to be answered, that we are sensible of the injuries inflicted on Mr. Ireland by these savage literary monsters. If the gentleman who wrote this letter will have the goodness to call upon me on the subject, I will give him my advice with regard to the publication of which he speaks & will do everything else for his widow & children that can reasonably be expected of me.

I have heard from various quarters, at different times, accounts of the pursuits, the character & the conduct of Mr, Wm Ireland, & I declare my belief that he was an excellently good man in all the relationships of life. He has always been more or less connected with the theatre & theatrical people, he happened to be in France when Mrs. Jordan Died & while she had A Numerous Family of Children Living, all rolling in surfeiting luxury, he had to raise a subscription, & to subscribe

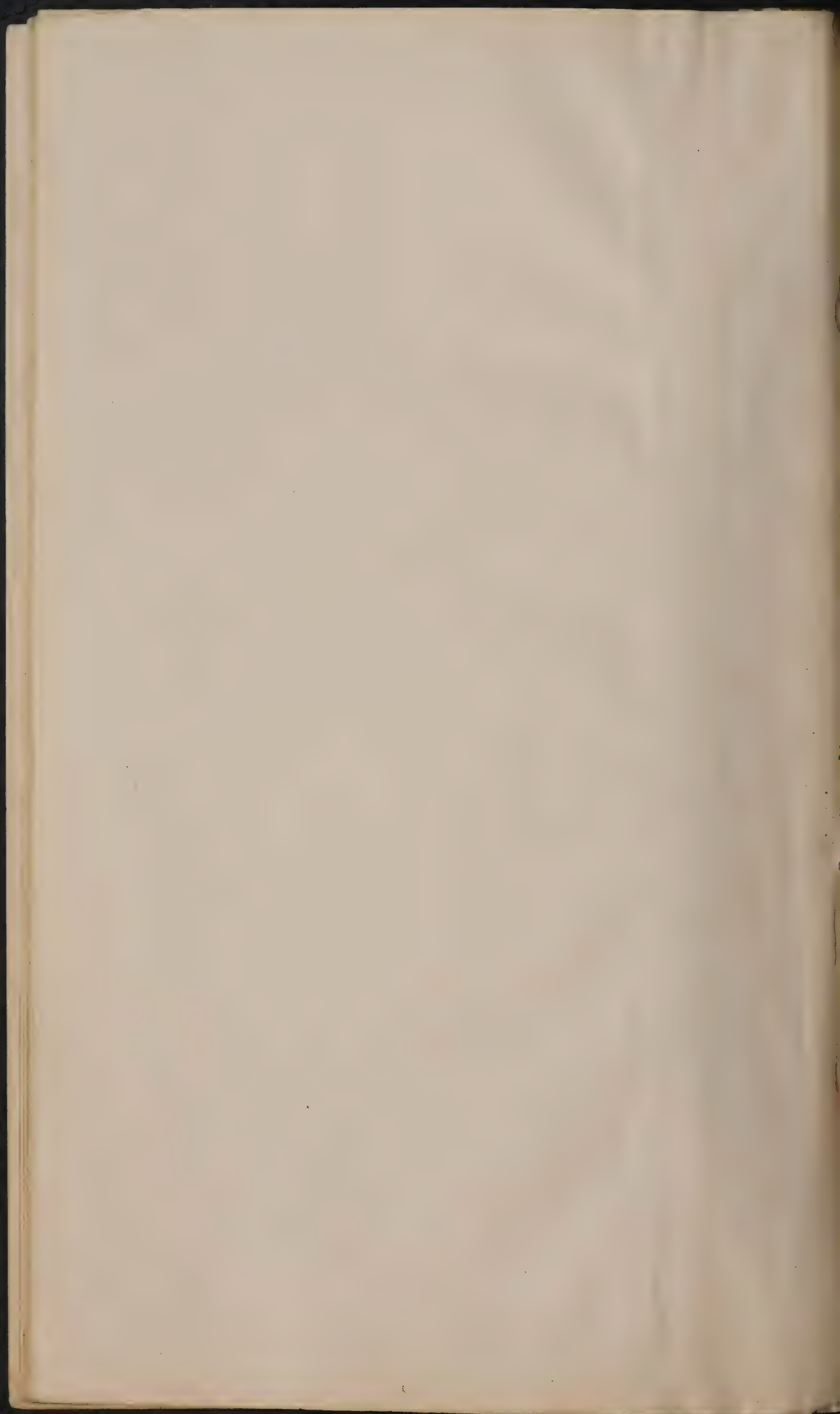


himself to purchase a coffin & a shroud & to follow her body while it received Christian burial.

"To be sure" said he to me, in relating the sad story of her death, "she had faults such as no man can justify, she had offended against the decorum of civil society, all the rest of the world might be excused for leaving her to her fate, but there were persons who ought to have perished, rather than have suffered her to come to that fate, & who at the recollection of it, ought to be covered with blushes to the end of their lives."

These are among the last words I ever heard him utter, & they expressed an opinion in which I most heartily concurred.

With regard to Mr. Ireland let these facts be born in mind, that he was no forger, no impostor according to the usual meaning of those words, that he had a perfect right to put forth the publications which he put forth, that there was nothing illegal & nothing immoral in any of his proceedings as to this matter, that Drs. Wharton & Parr were deemed the two most learned men in the kingdom, that they declared & certified that it was their conviction that no human being could write those manuscripts but Shakspeare, that when Mr. Ireland was discovered to be the real author, the whole band of literary ruffians fell upon him, & would have destroyed him if they had been able, with as little remorse as men destroy a mad dog, that they compelled him to lead a hard life, & to struggle along for decent existence, that their ferocious injustice disabled him from making that provision which he otherwise would have made for his widow & children, & I do hope with all these facts before us, we shall do something that may lead to the assistance of these inoffending persons, while it will serve the purpose of marking our indignation at the conduct of the literary ruffians



who were his oppressors,& who are real impostors,living in luxury,generally on taxes raised from the sweat of of the people,sometimes on the fruit of the delusions which they practise on that credulity,which ascribes learning,& piety,& fitness to guide,to all those who have the impudence to put forward pretentions & to assume the title of learned men.

Note:- William Cobbett died on the 17th.June 1835
only eighteen days after the above was printed.

G.Hilder Libbis.

is oppressors, & who are real impostors, living
generally on taxes raised from the sweat of
the, sometimes on the fruit of the delusions
pretence on that equality, which ascribes
piety, & fitness to guide, to all those who
pretend to put forward pretensions & to as-
sume the title of learned men.

William Cobbett died on the 17th. June 1835
fifty eight years after the above was printed.
G. Miller Libby.

